



Illinois Department of Human Services Commission

September 8th, 2011

Did not present

To Whom It May Concern:

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On behalf of Erie Neighborhood House, I would like to inform you about the impact the cuts in funding have had on programming at our agency, in particular Teen REACH funding for our youth department. For the past 3 years, Teen REACH has been steadily reduced in the range of 25-30% of the overall budget. This has resulted in Erie House having to lay off youth program staff as well as a mandatory cap for enrollment in our youth program despite a growing waiting list. Due to limited staffing, Erie House has had to cut the hours of time open to participants. Although the quality in programming being delivered has not changed, the number of youth served at a particular time has been impacted.

Erie House cannot operate at the same pace and address the growing need with less money and resources. In addition, the frequency of our program delivery has also been reduced. For example, an art program would run once a week for 3 hours; now it is an art workshop 1-2 times a quarter for 3 hours. Erie's Youth Department is no longer able to offer Latin Dance classes, which served as a healthy, positive outlook that nurtured the youth's pride in their culture due to these funding cuts. Erie House has had to prioritize programming at the expense of consistency, creativity, and program variety that we know are critical for engaging young people. For instance, we now rely on volunteers to coach teams rather having a dedicated staff to oversee sports programs. At-risk youth need consistent and stable relationships with the same adults and unfortunately we are not always able to offer that consistency due to the use of volunteers to fill the gaps in staffing.



There has also been a demand in quality after school programming in the area with the increase in public high schools. There are currently six high schools within a six block radius of Erie House. Although Erie House has partnered with these schools, there simply are not enough resources to service the youth. Youth typically have to wait at least 6 months in order to join our program. We are asking for the IDHS Commission to reinstate full funding for Teen REACH and after school program funds since we are able to show that this is money that directly goes to assisting youth in completing high school and going on to college. Erie's TEAM mentoring program is able to show a 100% high school graduation rate for all those youth enrolled in TEAM and this year 100% of those students were also accepted to college. This is the dramatic end result of dollars that are given to sports programs, dance classes, science clubs, tutoring, and media art and technology classes. It would increase the number of college trips a youth can attend or even give a youth a chance to play an organized sport like basketball when they get cut from the school team because they did not know the fundamentals. Agencies like Erie House give youth a voice to be heard when schools are over enrolled and cannot give students the individual attention they deserve and that is critical to school completion. The positive youth development model tells us that in order for youth to be successful then all they need is ONE positive adult role model. With adequate resources and governmental support, Erie House can provide this.

Sincerely,

Celena Roldan, Executive Director